July, 1920
China - Stories & incidents.

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THE WEAVERS

A Series of Chinese Impersonations

By

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PRICE FIFTEEN CENTS

WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Publication Office, Boston, Massachusetts

THE WEAVERS

In this series of impersonations, the native characters should appear in costume. Each part can be developed by adding other characters besides the speaker. In No. 1 the second Bible woman could be brought in by Mrs. Ma; in No. 2 a group of children might be clustered around the speaker; in No. 3 the missionary should come, for to her the pastor's wife is telling her story. It would be well to introduce the five children. Each story should be told in an animated way with gestures. The prolocutor's parts are very important and will add much to the presentations if delivered with good voice and spirit.

Prolocutor. "What are foreign missions? They are the flying shuttle that weaves and weaves and weaves the seamless robe of the Lord Christ until it is ample enough to cover those at home and those abroad; until it is great enough to overshadow our entire humanity with the sense of infinite compassion, universal brotherhood and eternal love."

This shuttle is at work today. Four women typical of many who may be numbered among the "weavers of the robe of the Lord Christ" in China, a Bible woman, a day school teacher, a preacher's wife and a simple-hearted village church member, will each tell her story in her own way.

FIRST SPEAKER

"I am Mrs. Ma, a Bible woman working in what may be said to be the hardest appointment on the Lan Hsien District. You can tell it's a fishing town because of the tall flagpoles which tower high above the one-story houses. A ragged flag flutters from each, indicating when a "catch" is in and there's fish at that place for sale. Most of the money is made in the summer, so the winter is passed in comparative idleness. As ever, "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do" — for gambling and worse wickedness run rampant.

A respectable woman can scarcely go on the street without having slurring remarks made by the idle street loafers. Indeed, when they first saw me, they talked that way but I frankly told them they could see by my age and by the gospel I came to preach that I was not the sort of woman who frequented the streets to

no good purpose. But just because it is such a wicked place seems all the more reason why they need the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's surely true that no one with less dauntless power and love than the Lord Jesus would have been willing to give His life to save such a place.

It's often discouraging work, for frequently when I get a woman to the place where she is willing to enter a Bible class, her superstitious mother-in-law vetoes the idea and there's nothing to do but submit to the decree.

"Yet do you know the spirit of the conquering Christ *is* at work here? Here is old Mrs. Lee who on Palm Sunday joined the church. When I first visited her home two years ago, she was considered a notorious character. She could curse more vehemently than any one in town and had an ungovernable temper. Somehow she took the Ten Commandments to heart, as they were explained to her, while she questioned and gradually she grasped what they and the gospel story meant. She saw my hymn book, but knew at her age — sixty-eight — she could never learn to read the thousands of characters in it. She asked me to point out the characters for 'Jesus,' and went through the book, finding every place where His name occurred. She did the same with the word 'love,' which seemed to her next to 'Jesus' in this new religion. Then she learned the doxology, singing it more or less out of tune to be sure, but getting the words correct. Her neighbors say she is a different woman since she has given up her bad habit of cursing and is trusting the True God to help her keep her temper. On Palm Sunday as she came to the altar to be received on probation, I just prayed that it might signal the triumphal entry of the Master into more and more hearts of this town. In that faith I labor on."

Prolocutor. The area of China is greater than that of all the nations of Europe and within her territory lives one-quarter of the world's population, yet in this vast number not one man in ten can read and not one woman in a thousand. The little day schools which missionaries and native workers have established here and there have done much to let the light shine into the dark corners of this great empire. Mrs. Chang will now tell us about her school at "Little Mountain Mouth."

SECOND SPEAKER

To come to see me in action you will have to go beyond the Great Wall of China over into Manchuria. You may lose heart

before you reach "Little Mountain Mouth" for after you leave the railway and cart road you must go on donkey back over the narrow and precipitous trail through the mountains.

When my little school was started a year ago, it was pretty much of an experiment. There is no church in this village of a few hundred people, just a group of about fifty Christians. To one of the most enterprising business men of the group, a Mr. Kang, God granted such a vision of the need for a girls' school in the town, that he gave neither himself nor the missionaries in charge of the district any rest until the school was opened. He promised to make up any deficit in tuition which the pupils were too poor to pay.

School began with many children from non-Christian homes in attendance. They were anxious to study reading and writing, but on arithmetic and especially on lessons about Christianity they thought they would rather not waste their time. It took much prayerful effort on my part to lead them to see the value for time and eternity in the study of the Scriptures as provided for in the curriculum. Then outside of the course of study there was teaching them to pray, and to make their lives accord with the prayers they said. The girls all had bound feet at first — as had every other girl and woman in the town. Far back as anyone could remember that had been the style. How I have worked with the mothers and mothers-in-law to get them to consent to their little girls being freed from the torture they have suffered! They are poor people who will have to be working all their lives. Hence it is the more cruel a mockery to handicap themselves just to follow such an inhuman custom. Half of the girls have unbound their feet, and I am just praying the others will, too.

On Sundays the schoolhouse has been the gathering place for a service which I usually have to lead. Six months ago I took charge of organizing a Woman's Missionary Society. I knew it would mean extra work for me, for I am the only one who has belonged to such a society before, and the only one who can write or read much. Every full moon time we meet, so we can always remember just when it is time for the Missionary Society. It is so good to have something which the women can think and pray about and give towards,— something that is outside the four walls of their homes or the narrow boundaries of the village.

It is what some people call "missionary work" to be teacher, preacher, and counsellor in this remote place some distance from my home. I do miss having no pastor or pastor's wife to whom

to go for advice. But then the Great Comrade is with me, and that is all I really *need.*

Prolocutor. Christian wives of native preachers have quite as great an opportunity for service as their husbands, and many of them, in spite of home cares, give valiant service to the Church. Let one of them tell her story.

THIRD SPEAKER

"Why, how fortunate that I started home when I did, to arrive just in time to open the gate for you. Come right in and be seated on the kang while I heat water for some tea. (Enter Missionary.)

"I've had a busy day, but then every day has been a busy one since I returned from the Woman's Conference last fall. I used to think I hadn't any time to do personal work in the homes of this town — but I've found out differently since September. Oh, I forgot — you haven't seen me since then, so you haven't heard about it. Well, I'll have to begin at the very beginning.

"I was one of the preachers' wives invited to attend the Conference for Bible women and Christian workers held in Changli. You know how I have this family of five children and have taught them myself till they finished the primary grades. So I thought with all this, and being a preacher's wife, that I was quite a church worker.

"My husband and I have often talked of how much need there is in our town for personal work in the homes. So the very first day of that Conference, I went to the missionary in charge, asking if she couldn't send us a Bible woman. She agreed with me that we needed one, but sadly shook her head saying there were only eighteen women for seventy-five preaching places, and there was simply no one to send.

"Strange how those words 'no one to send' kept echoing and re-echoing in my heart! Stranger still was the way I felt as if every word of that Conference was aimed directly at *me.* One day the question was asked: 'Have you led any one to Christ this year?' and I knew that I hadn't even tried to do such a thing. As I thought of my life, spent just for those of my own family, it seemed so selfish. I was so conscience-stricken that I was utterly miserable until the day when some one read from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Why I could just hear the Lord asking, 'Whom shall I send to Shih-ke-chuang, and who will go for Me?' Well, my throat began to feel sort of tight and choky and I just

bowed my head and said, 'Here am I, send me.' Next day I told the missionary I was going to try to be the Bible woman our town of Shih-ke-chuang needed.

"From the time I came back home until now, I haven't missed a day speaking to some one about Jesus Christ. The new phonetic method of reading Chinese I've taught to many of the girls and women of the town. The reading book I use with them contains Bible verses, so I always try to have a Bible lesson and a hymn and prayer along with the reading.

"My housework? Oh, yes, there's as much of that as ever to do, for the three youngest children are at home. They outgrow their clothes so fast that I often have to sit up till midnight sewing for them. But I'm glad to spend and be spent — only I long for more and more time and strength for definitely Christian personal work. I want to be like Mary of whom our Lord said, 'She hath chosen the better part.'

"Here let me pour you some more tea while I listen to what you've done today for the Kingdom."

Prolocutor. To travel one hundred li in one day over such a rocky, mountainous road as this in the northern part of Tsunhua district is more than flesh should be called upon to endure. Let us break the journey by stopping overnight with Mrs. Huo. Never mind if you have never met her before, her home is like those hospitable, old-fashioned American country homes where a wayfarer, especially a preacher or missionary, is always given a welcome.

The report that we are arriving must have been carried by the wind, for here she comes to greet us, her dear old face wreathed in smiles. As we climb out of the cart and go into the house, she wants to carry all our impedimenta.

After supper, the neighbors begin gathering for evening prayers. Every evening in this remote village, too small to boast of a church, the Christians gather at old Mrs. Huo's for prayers. Soon the wide k'ang is filled with some twenty women, while the men and boys sit on benches or stand. What a real part in the developing and encouraging of their Christian lives such a meeting plays!

Next morning after breakfast, we insist on Mrs. Huo going about her regular work. It is the season for cloth weaving. We know she is busy like other village women. In a patch at the side of one of their tiny fields, the cotton was raised. With her own hands the thread was spun and now is being woven into cloth. Later on it will be dyed a dark blue, then made into clothing.

She sits down at the crude old loom, adjusts the threads, and as she weaves she talks to us, her narrative punctuated by the click of the shifting pedals.

FOURTH SPEAKER

"What a blessed thing the Lord's leading is! He has always been so patient with me — even back in the days when I would have no part or parcel in this new religion my husband had accepted. I was ailing with lung trouble much of the time. One night, after a bad spell, I had a dream and it seemed that the God my husband worshiped was saying that I must be forever separated from the rest of the family if I didn't believe and worship Him, too. When I woke up I could scarcely believe it had been a dream it seemed so real. Someway I wanted to find out more about this Jesus, and at last I gave my heart to Him.

"Then came those awful Boxer days of 1900. I can yet feel how tired, hunted and frightened we were as we hid first in these mountains just back of our house, then in those farther away. Friends smuggled food to us till the danger was past. When it was safe enough, we ventured home, to find our house had been looted and burned by the Boxers. But the Lord was with us and surely would make good the promise, 'I will restore again the ruins.'

"Things were just beginning to pick up, when my eldest daughter died. You know her husband was a preacher. She was such a homey body,— that parsonage with their two little girls and wee baby Philip was the most inviting place. It did seem as if she was needed here on earth, but I guess the Lord felt He needed her more to help make heaven a cheerier place in which to welcome us all some day.

"Not long after that, my son, who was at the head of his class in the Tsunhua school, died of cholera. My neighbors said, 'What good does it do to be a Christian? The way your children are dying must mean the gods are angry at you.' I prayed for faith like Job's to answer them, 'the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Ever since that time, Job has been one of my favorites of all those Bible people.

"The Lord has kept on giving me strength each day."

(Here the weaving stopped and she crossed the room, unlocked a huge wooden box and from it drew a bag of coins, saying,) "I mustn't forget to give you our missionary collection of $1.20. It's not very much, but it's better than I ever thought our little society of fifteen members could do, with no rain and crops so

bad and every one so poor. We're glad to give it to help take the gospel to others. Won't it be a surprise, when we get to heaven, to have some African woman, or maybe some woman from Yunnan come up to us on one of those golden streets and say, 'You're responsible for my being here. It was that money you gave away up there in Huochuang, China that helped bring the gospel to me.' "

Prolocutor. The weaving began again. As the cotton threads were transformed into firm, strong fabric under her deft fingers, it seemed to typify just what these Christian Chinese women are doing for the Kingdom. As their lives go in and out among their non-Christian neighbors, their unselfish love and devotion is "weaving the seamless robe of the Lord Christ until it is great enough to overshadow our entire humanity with the sense of Infinite Compassion, Universal Brotherhood and Eternal Love."